In Honor of Sy Brody: A Documentary History of the Del Rey Lagoon Park Addition, Playa del Rey

Version 1.0.4 · June 2026

Executive Summary

A weathered bronze plaque at Del Rey Lagoon Park in Playa del Rey honors the memory of Sy Brody, "whose caring and dedication made it possible for all of us to enjoy the Del Rey Lagoon Park today." This report reconstructs the documentary history behind that plaque using the recorded grant deed, assessor parcel records, contemporary newspaper accounts, and Brody's obituary.

The section was conveyed to the City of Los Angeles in 1971 by District Grand Lodge No. 4, B'nai B'rith, a corporation, under a grant deed titled "Recreation and Parks, Playa Del Rey Lagoon Addition," recorded November 11, 1971. Sy Brody (Seymour Brody, who died in June 1982) was a member of that lodge and the park's devoted volunteer steward: by the account of City Councilwoman Pat Russell, he cleaned the park weekly and, when a parking-lot conversion was attempted, secured her intervention to stop it. The commemorative plaque was dedicated at the park on Saturday, March 19, 1983, by Councilwoman Russell. Brody's tie to the donor lodge connects the institutional gift of the land to the man whose name the section bears.

The Plaque

Set into a granite base at Del Rey Lagoon Park, the bronze plaque reads:

> "THIS SECTION IS IN HONOR OF THE MEMORY OF SY BRODY, WHOSE CARING AND DEDICATION MADE IT POSSIBLE FOR ALL OF US TO ENJOY THE DEL REY LAGOON PARK TODAY; LOVE AND RESPECT IT AS HE DID."

The wording is precise. It honors "this section" of the park and frames Brody's contribution as one of caring, dedication, and stewardship. The land beneath this section was a gift of B'nai B'rith District Grand Lodge No. 4, Brody's own lodge, while his contribution was the years of personal stewardship that the city chose to memorialize here.

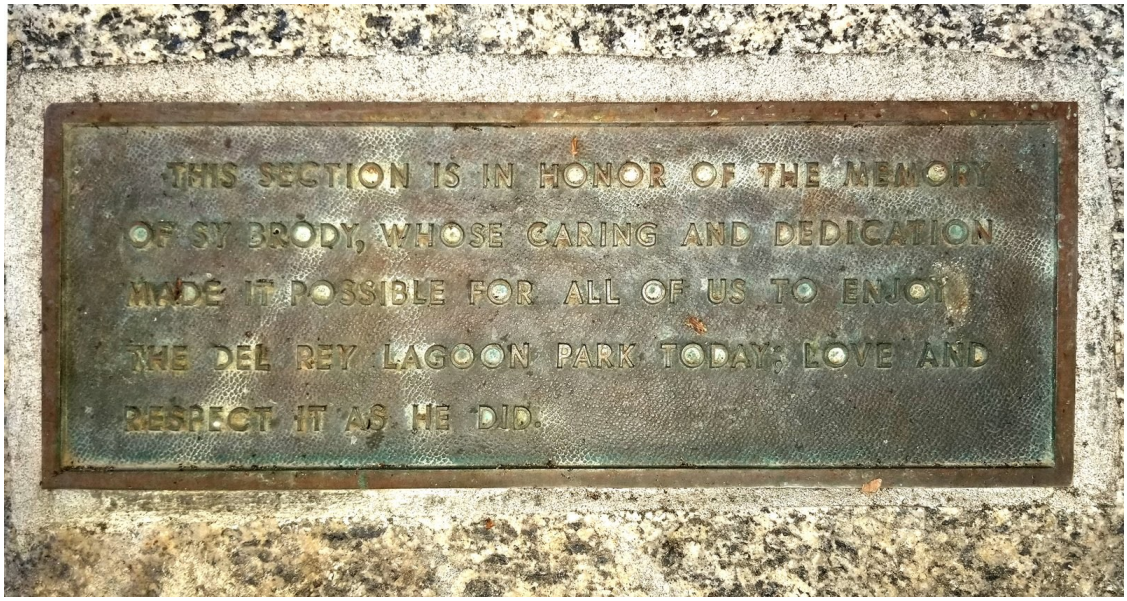
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Figure 1. The Sy Brody commemorative plaque at Del Rey Lagoon Park.

The Park and the Lagoon

Del Rey Lagoon Park is a municipal park of roughly fourteen acres in Playa del Rey, bounded by Ballona Creek to the north, Pacific Avenue to the west, and Esplanade and adjacent residential development to the east. At its center is Del Rey Lagoon, a shallow waterbody of about five to six acres.[1, 2]

The lagoon is the surviving remnant of a failed nineteenth-century harbor scheme. Promoters attempted to dredge a deep-water harbor here, Port Ballona, to capture Pacific trade, but waves and silting defeated the effort within a few years, and what remained of the excavation became the lagoon.[2] This stretch of coast was historically a seasonal, intermittently tidal lagoon system rather than a permanently open estuary. Del Rey Lagoon itself retained a tidal exit channel as late as 1929, before the surrounding delta was reworked by oilfield development, by flood-control channelization of Ballona Creek in the 1930s, and by the construction of Marina del Rey in the 1960s.[1]

The park was assembled from many parcels over decades rather than acquired at once. Several undeveloped blocks south of the lagoon were acquired in the early 1960s and developed with ball fields and a playground.[1] The 1971 B'nai B'rith gift documented here was one such addition, recorded under the title "Playa Del Rey Lagoon Addition."

Early Land Tenure of Block 6

The gift parcel lies in Block 6 of a resubdivision of a portion of the Playa Del Rey Townsite, the subdivision recorded in Book 7, Page 130 of Maps in the office of the Los Angeles

County Recorder (M.B. 7-130). The early ownership of this block is documented in the County Assessor's assessment and improvement index for 1902 through 1912, which lists the Block 6 lots under the heading "Playa Del Rey Townsite, As per Bk. 7 P. 130 of Maps." In that period the lots were assessed largely to the Beach Land Company together with a roster of individual investors, among them Ellen J. Swan, Mrs. L. G. Visscher, Lutie M. Stearns, the Percy H. Clark Company, Albert R. Robbins, and Emily L. Garbutt, with per-lot assessed values generally in the range of two hundred to several hundred dollars.[3]

The parcel's later assessment lineage runs through the County Assessor's "Del Rey Beach" book (Old Book 572, with relevant entries at pages 24, 25, and 28) to the current assessor sheet for Map Book 4116, Page 2, which depicts the consolidated, City-owned parcel as Assessor Parcel Number 4116-002-908, an area of about 15,813 square feet, within the broader context of Tract No. 48319 (M.B. 1191-42-43) and "A Portion of Playa Del Rey Townsite, M.B. 7-130."[4] The legal description carried in the 1971 deed corresponds to this parcel, providing a continuous chain from the early-twentieth-century subdivision to present public ownership.

The 1971 Gift: District Grand Lodge No. 4, B'nai B'rith

The conveyance that added this section to the park is a recorded Grant Deed bearing City Right-of-Way No. 28524-1Z and titled "Recreation and Parks, Playa Del Rey Lagoon Addition." The grantor is District Grand Lodge No. 4, B'nai B'rith, a corporation, which granted the property to the City of Los Angeles, a municipal corporation, in consideration of ten dollars.[5]

B'nai B'rith District Grand Lodge No. 4 was chartered in San Francisco in 1863 and served as the order's western district, covering much of the western United States. Across its history it established orphan asylums, homes for the aged, and religious schools, and conducted extensive charitable and community work; in 2004 it became part of the Golden Pacific Region of B'nai B'rith International. Its institutional records, including membership rolls and directories, are held at the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, through the Western Jewish History Center.[6]

The deed conveys two described interests:

- Description 1: Lots 1, 2, 3, and 4 in Block 6 of the resubdivision of a portion of Playa Del Rey Townsite (M.B. 7-130).
- Description 2: Those portions of Lots 5 and 6 of Block 6 lying northeasterly of the 30-foot strip conveyed to the Los Angeles Pacific Company.

Readers tracing title will also find the reservations and exceptions typical of coastal property here, each recorded on the face of the deed: a road right of way over the westerly 10 feet of Lot 6; the southwesterly 10 feet previously granted to the City of Los Angeles by deed recorded July 27, 1938 (Book 15980, Page 38, Official Records); and one-half of the oil, gas, and other hydrocarbons under the land, reserved without right of surface entry by Title Insurance and Trust Company in deeds recorded between 1925 and 1930.[5]

The grantor executed the deed on June 28, 1971, by Jerome M. Bristol, President, and Norman Simon, Executive Director, with the corporate acknowledgment taken before a notary public in San Diego County. The instrument then passed through the standard City review chain in the Department of Public Works, Bureau of Right of Way and Land: it was approved as to authority on November 5, 1971; approved as to description for City Engineer Lyall A. Pardee by Deputy Donald R. Howery; and approved as to form for City Attorney Roger Arnebergh by Deputy Thomas P. Adams. The deed was recorded on November 11, 1971.[5]

Acceptance and the Park Addition

The City's acceptance is recorded on the deed itself by a Certificate of Acceptance executed on behalf of the Board of Recreation and Park Commissioners of the City of Los Angeles, under the authority of Resolution No. 4561, dated May 23, 1963. That 1963 resolution was a standing authorization permitting the Board to accept grants and dedications of land for park and recreational purposes, which is why the certificate could be executed and dated on the form in advance of the grantor's June 1971 signature and the deed's November 1971 recording. The certificate is dated April 4, 1971, and signed by the Secretary of the Board.[5]

Through this acceptance, the Block 6 parcel (APN 4116-002-908) entered the City's park system as the "Playa Del Rey Lagoon Addition." The plaque's reference to "this section" corresponds to this added section of the park.

Sy Brody, Member and Steward

Sy Brody was a Playa del Rey resident and a hands-on guardian of Del Rey Lagoon Park. He was also a member of B'nai B'rith District Grand Lodge No. 4, the lodge that donated this section, a connection confirmed by the lodge and by the Western Jewish History Center, which holds its records.[7] The section he tended for years was land his own lodge had given to the city.

The fullest contemporaneous account of his stewardship is the report of the 1983 dedication, which quotes City Councilwoman Pat Russell. Russell represented the city's 6th District, which then included Playa del Rey, from 1969 to 1987.[8] According to her, Brody "worked every week to voluntarily clean up after weekend picnickers and visitors had gone."[9]

His stewardship extended to active defense of the park. When an effort was made to convert a portion of Del Rey Lagoon Park to a parking lot, Brody contacted Councilwoman Russell, who helped stop the plan, and city personnel were directed to restore the section that had been disturbed. Brody died while that restoration was under way.[9]

His death notice, published in the Los Angeles Times on Monday, June 28, 1982, records his survivors: his wife, Sally Berkun Brody; his children, Beth Brody Spivak and David Brody; and his grandchildren, Jason and Elissa Spivak.[10]

The 1983 Dedication

The Marina del Rey weekly *The Argonaut* reported the dedication in its issue of Thursday, March 17, 1983, under the headline "Sy Brody honored Saturday." A portion of Del Rey Lagoon Park was dedicated to the late Sy Brody during an 11 a.m. ceremony on Saturday, March 19, 1983, at the Playa del Rey park, with Councilwoman Russell dedicating the plaque. The article recorded the full plaque text and quoted Russell's tribute calling Brody "the one person most responsible for the beauty and cleanliness of Del Rey Lagoon Park."[9]

Summary of the Documentary Record

The primary sources together establish a single coherent account. A fraternal and charitable order, B'nai B'rith District Grand Lodge No. 4, gave the Block 6 parcel to the City of Los Angeles, recorded November 11, 1971, and the City accepted it as the Playa Del Rey Lagoon Addition under its standing 1963 Board resolution. The parcel is Assessor Parcel Number 4116-002-908, about 15,813 square feet, with a continuous chain of title back to the early-twentieth-century subdivision. Sy Brody, a member of that lodge, personally stewarded the section for years and was the catalyst for halting a parking-lot conversion. After his death in 1982, the City dedicated a commemorative plaque in his honor on March 19, 1983.

Civic and Legal Context of 1971

The gift fell within a period of heightened public attention to open space. The first Earth Day was observed on April 22, 1970, and the National Environmental Policy Act was signed into law on January 1, 1970. In the same legislative season California enacted the Public Park Preservation Act of 1971 (Public Resources Code sections 5400 through 5409), which constrains public agencies from converting existing parkland to non-park uses without replacement.[11] These measures describe the era's climate; the operative instrument for this section was a private conveyance accepted by the Board of Recreation and Park Commissioners under its standing 1963 resolution. Private gifts of coastal land for permanent park use were consonant with the broader civic commitment to open space that this period crystallized.

Significance

The Del Rey Lagoon Addition illustrates an unusually well-documented chapter in Southern California's long contest between development and open space. A fraternal and charitable order gave the land; one of its members then gave that land years of personal stewardship; and when the section was threatened, his persistence and a responsive council office preserved it. The plaque records the human half of that partnership. In an era when much of the surrounding coastal lowland was reworked for flood control, oil, aviation, and marina development, the survival of this section of Del Rey Lagoon as accessible public parkland reflects both the lodge's gift and the care of the member whose name it bears.

Documentary Exhibits (also see: Newspaper Exhibits 6 and 7)

The following primary sources underlie this report and should accompany it in the archived record.

1. Commemorative plaque, Del Rey Lagoon Park (photograph). *See Figure 1.*
2. Grant Deed, District Grand Lodge No. 4, B'nai B'rith, to the City of Los Angeles, R/W No. 28524-1Z, "Recreation and Parks, Playa Del Rey Lagoon Addition," executed June 28, 1971, recorded November 11, 1971 (three pages, with Certificate of Acceptance and City approvals).
3. Assessor Parcel Map, Book 4116, Page 2 (Sheet 1), showing City parcel 908 (APN 4116-002-908, about 15,813 square feet), Tract No. 48319 (M.B. 1191-42-43), "A Portion of Playa Del Rey Townsite, M.B. 7-130."
4. County Assessor assessment and improvement index, Map Book 0139 (1902 through 1912), page 063, "Playa Del Rey Townsite, As per Bk. 7 P. 130 of Maps," Block 6 lot assessments.
5. County Assessor "Del Rey Beach" assessment map, Old Book 0572 (1947 through 1951), page 003, revised May 15, 1951.
6. Obituary, "BRODY, Seymour," Los Angeles Times, Monday, June 28, 1982, page 37.
7. "Sy Brody honored Saturday," The Argonaut (Marina del Rey), Thursday, March 17, 1983, page 9.

Sources

[1] "Del Rey Lagoon Park," English Wikipedia.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Del_Rey_Lagoon_Park

[2] "Playa del Rey, Los Angeles," English Wikipedia.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Playa_del_Rey,_Los_Angeles

[3] County Assessor, assessment and improvement index, Map Book 0139 (1902 through 1912), page 063, Playa Del Rey Townsite, Block 6.

[4] County Assessor parcel map, Book 4116, Page 2; APN 4116-002-908; Tract No. 48319 (M.B. 1191-42-43); A Portion of Playa Del Rey Townsite, M.B. 7-130. Assessment lineage: Old Book 0572 (Del Rey Beach), pages 24, 25, 28.

[5] Grant Deed, District Grand Lodge No. 4, B'nai B'rith, to the City of Los Angeles, R/W No. 28524-1Z, "Recreation and Parks, Playa Del Rey Lagoon Addition," executed June 28, 1971, recorded November 11, 1971, Los Angeles County Official Records (reference D-5253-526). Department of Public Works, Bureau of Right of Way and Land.

[6] B'nai B'rith, District Grand Lodge No. 4 records (finding aid), Online Archive of California, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley. https://oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/c83t9jz9

[7] B'nai B'rith District Grand Lodge No. 4 and the Western Jewish History Center, confirmation of Sy Brody's lodge membership. The lodge's membership records are held at the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

[8] Pat Russell, biographical record, English Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pat_Russell

[9] "Sy Brody honored Saturday," The Argonaut (Marina del Rey, California), March 17, 1983, page 9.

[10] "BRODY, Seymour," obituary, Los Angeles Times, June 28, 1982, page 37.

[11] California Public Resources Code section 5400 (Public Park Preservation Act of 1971; Stats. 1971, Ch. 1642). https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?lawCode=PRC&sectionNum=5400

City officials named on the deed are corroborated by public records: Lyall A. Pardee, City Engineer (City of Los Angeles Bureau of Engineering, https://engineering.lacity.gov/lyall-pardee); Roger Arnebergh, City Attorney 1953 to 1973 (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roger_Arnebergh). The park's civic address and parcel can be confirmed at the City of Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks (https://www.laparks.org/park/del-rey-lagoon) and the Los Angeles County Assessor portal (https://portal.assessor.lacounty.gov).

Version History

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Appendix: Newspaper Exhibits (Exhibits 6 and 7)

The Los Angeles Times (Los Angeles, California) · Mon, Jun 28, 1982

BRODY, Seymour, beloved husband to Sally Berkun Brody; adoring father to Beth Brody Spivak and David Brody; very special friend and loving grandfather to Jason and Elissa Spivak.

Exhibit 6. Obituary, Los Angeles Times, June 28, 1982, page 37

The Argonaut (Marina del Rey, California) · Thu, Mar 17, 1983 · Page 9

Sy Brody honored Saturday

A portion of Del Rey Lagoon Park will be dedicated to the late Sy Brody during 11 a.m. ceremonies Saturday, March 19th, at the Playa del Rey park.

"Mr. Brody worked every week to voluntarily clean up after weekend picnickers and visitors had gone," Councilwoman Pat Russell said.

When an effort was made to convert a portion of the park to a parking lot, Sy Brody contacted the councilwoman, who helped stop the plan.

City personnel were directed to restore the portion of the Del Rey Lagoon Park which had been disturbed. Brody passed away while the park restoration was taking place.

Saturday, Councilwoman Russell will dedicate a plaque in honor of Brody.

The plaque reads, "This section is in honor of the memory of Sy Brody, whose caring and dedication made it possible for all of us to enjoy the Del Rey Lagoon Park today; Love and respect it as he did."

The councilwoman called Brody "the one person most responsible for the beauty and cleanliness of Del Rey Lagoon Park."

Exhibit 7. 'Sy Brody honored Saturday,' The Argonaut, March 17, 1983, page 9